DON BLUTH'S TOONTALK

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Space Ace
The Arcade Game of the 80's

John Lounsbery
One of Disney's All-Time Greats

The Happy Prince
The Ultimate in Animation

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Dragon's Lair Episode IV

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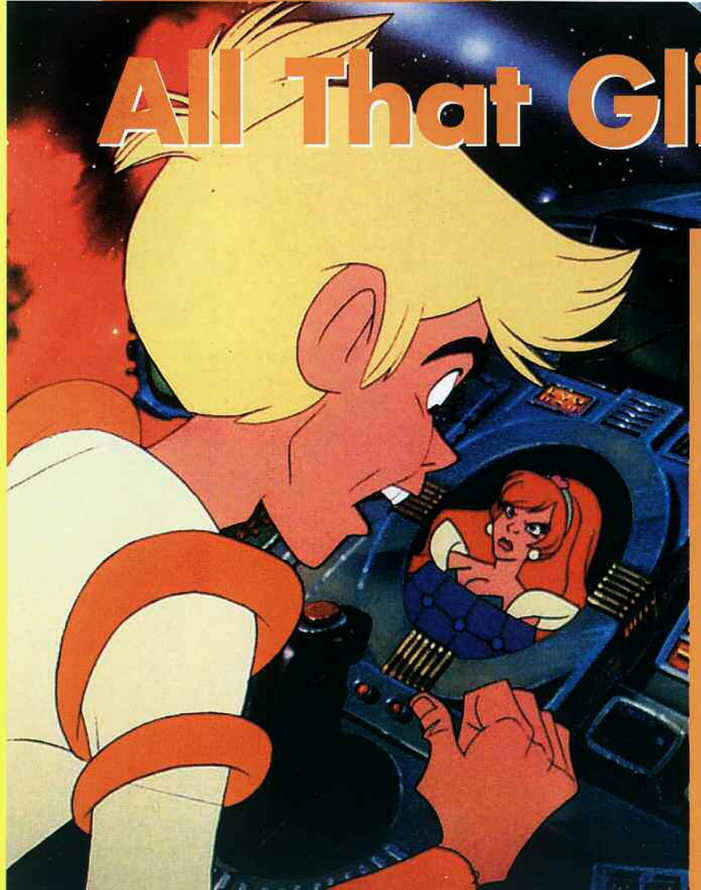
REVIEW

SPACE ACE

The name says it all. He's that cocky, self-assured, bon-vivant, sexy superhero, of the second laser disc game released in 1983. Ace is a cool dude, a cadet with a body of steel driven by a stubborn determination to win. He's the playgirl centerfold type who's madly in love with only one person, himself. He teases women, and his relentless ambition to possess Kimberly, (his female counterpart, whose character is similar to his own) is his quest. I'm sure deep down there is a likeable guy in Ace but for now, he's the varsity jock and a poser. The game introduces a villain named Borf, who aspires to rule the world with his Infanto ray gun. One pop from this baby and you're transformed back to those awkward prepubescent years, BLEUK! Could there be anything worse? Not for Ace. When he's hit he morphs into Dexter the nerd. If the game player is skillful, he can regain his manhood and score points, barring that, he is condemned to zitsville and another lost quarter. Some fun huh?

To date, *Dragon's Lair, Space Ace,* and *Time Warp,* are the only games we have ever produced. Now, a new 3-D version of *Dragon's Lair* is currently in the works for release early 2001. But, let's talk about *Space Ace*. Producing *Ace* was very intriguing. *Dragon's Lair*, you see, was a series of threats and resolves, while *Space Ace* took on the challenge of a plot driven movie. By that time, we knew that our target audience were teen males, the very ones that occasionally grow a profusion of hair and bay at the moon. And it's no secret either, that these snarling, panting, jungle-beasts can easily be threatened by insulting their manhood. Truly, that's what the game set out to do. If you could measure up to the game play, you got a chance to woo Kimberly. Conversely, if you fail, you lose your manly assets, and it is back to the nursery with you.



All That Glitters

Whatever dreams the seventeen Disney castaways might have had about *NIMH* being embraced with accolades vociferated by movie fans everywhere, were quickly dispelled just after *NIMH's* release. Although critically acclaimed, the movie crashed like a 747 whose wings were ripped off, and with it went my hopes of ever directing another animated film. I felt like a failure. I knew I was a laughing stock. In Burbank, I'm sure they were falling off their chairs. Executive Producer, Jim Stewart of Aurora saw how badly I was taking it all and attempted to cheer me up with his own unique controlled eloquence. "Welcome to the picture business Don, we'll find more funding and try it again." "You've got to be kidding," I snapped, "we just crashed the airplane, fat chance we'll ever see another cockpit." Jim insisted things would be better, but the money never happened. In the end, Don Bluth Productions said goodbye to Aurora, and struck out on its own. We hadn't a clue how to raise money for a movie. We were lost in the mist, just like Pooh and Rabbit, God love them, but giving up just wasn't an option. Besides, I knew that when a door closes, somewhere another one opens and, open it did. A smiling angel faced man appeared in my office one morning and handed me his card. It read, James Matzuo, Entertainment Manager. "Do I know you?" I asked. "No," he said, smiling, "but this is your lucky day. I'm going to get you out of the pit you've dug for yourself." As he continued, James said that *NIMH* had touched him deeply; he therefore had taken the liberty of making a few phone calls to his sources of "unlimited" funds. "Find your next movie," he commanded cheerfully, "leave the rest to me. I am going to Europe for three days, and when I return, you'll have all the money you need. You're back in the feature business, kiddo." He shook everyone's hands, bowed, and left. We all screamed, hugged each other, and danced about like crazies. We were overwhelmed with gratitude. We had been given a second chance, one that the crew would never suspect was the philanthropic mechanization of my guardian angel, Freddy. Ah Freddy, what a guy. What a facilitator, what a credit to his community. He was thereafter mentioned unceasingly in my prayers. Six weeks later however, there was still no trace of James Matzuo, not even a phone call. Feeling abandoned, I withdrew into my office, and reflected upon my guardian angel's shortcomings. I've got to admit that in this moment of weakness, I shamelessly called Freddy every dirty name in the book, I really shouldn't have done that. Anyway, within an hour of my tantrum, the phone rang. Slowly, I picked up the receiver. There, shouting excitedly on the other end of the phone line was the prodigal himself, James Matzuo. "Mr. Don," he sang out, "I found the money!" Like starving breadline beggars, the staff lunged hungrily forward towards the telephone, flagrantly salivating for even the slightest morsel of information. "I'm in Switzerland," James continued, "I'm in the airport. The money is in gold bullion, stashed beneath the runway!" "The runway," I gasped? Stashed? The money is under the runway in the Swiss airport, I repeated? Seriously! Oh, James, I was stunned. I decided to bail out. "Okay James, hurry back, man, you're the greatest." By the time I put the phone down, the crew was already on the floor convulsing with laughter. I felt like an idiot, and why not, I was dangerously close to being one. How could I have been so gullible, so stupid? Well, you know the old saying, fool me once. I know Freddy stages these little beatitudes to teach me valuable lessons, however, a simple note like, don't be gullible, would have sufficed.

BORF THE BLUE BADDIE

Who was the voice?

Who was the voice of Mickey Mouse? Walt Disney, of course. But, why would he do that? The historians, film critics, and psychoanalysts are all prodigious as rabbits in birthing theories on this one. I arrived at a theory of my own, it was simple economics, Walt did it to save money. I did the same thing during the making of *Space Ace*, money was very scarce, so, voila! Two of our animators were the voices of Space Ace and Kimberly, while I was the voice of the villain, Borf. Now hold on there, you may call that typecasting, but the truth is I was just being frugal.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

The sun came from behind the clouds the day Rick Dyer phoned. Having seen the *Secret Of NIMH*, Rick was determined that we should team up to make a video arcade game. He talked rapidly about some bumbling little knight fighting his way into a castle to rescue a princess, a knight called Dirk. Gary Goldman and I hadn't a clue what Rick was going on about, but we finally agreed to meet. This turned out to be one of the best decisions of our careers. Little did we know that the interactive games, *Dragon's Lair*, and later, *Space Ace*, assignments we took on simply to meet payroll, would both turn out to be a home runs.

It was with the introduction of animated arcade games, that we found the first new application for animation since 1949. It was time for animation to grow, it started as a novelty, but had potential to tell stories that cannot otherwise be told.

The animation form evolved from several seconds of gimmickry during Chautauqua shows, into the seven-minute shorts called cartoons. Then in 1937, it was used for the first time as an art form to tell a movie, *Snow White*.

There followed many classically animated films, the most successful being the early Disney features. In 1949, *Crusader Rabbit* was the first character designed and animated specifically for television.

Since that time, not a lot has happened, except that there has been a decline in the quality of movies, and what we now call Saturday Morning Kidvid.

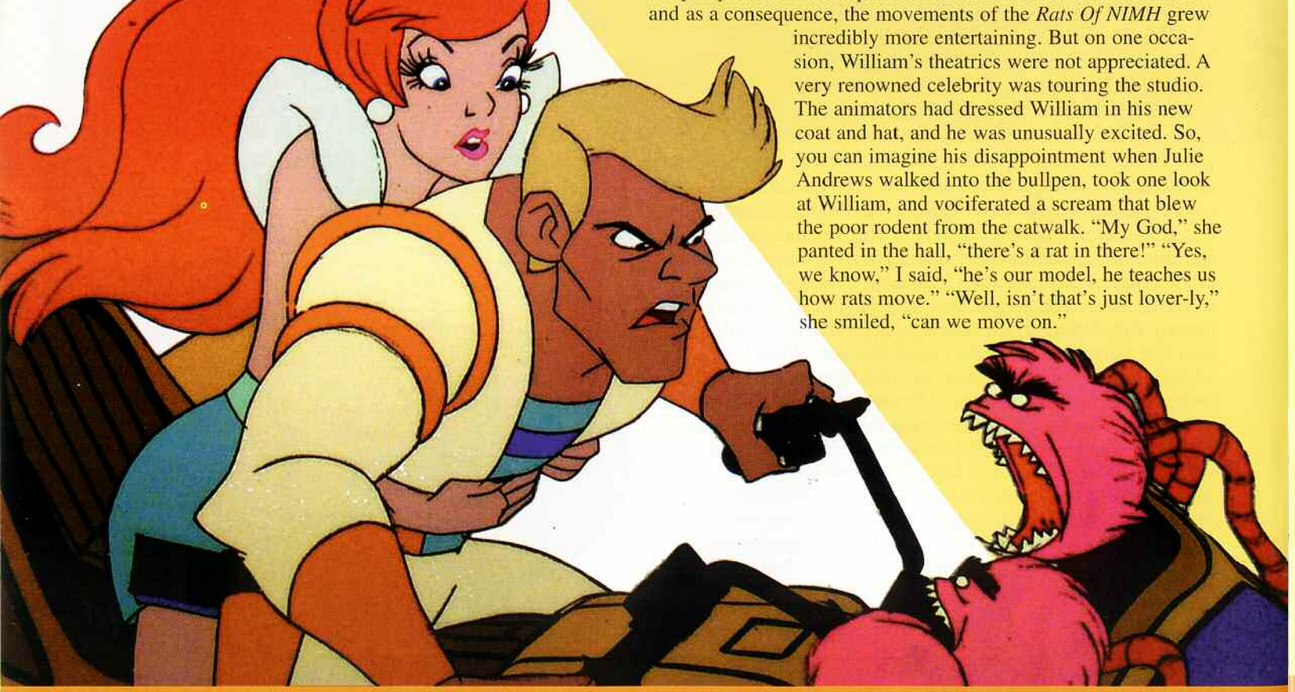
When our first feature, *Secret Of NIMH*, opened in 1982, there was a resurgence in interest toward animation. People saw that classical animation was indeed, not too expensive to produce, as had been claimed, and that there was at last one studio which had the artists with the special talents required to draw and paint it. Though the film was not considered successful at the box office, we learned there is an audience for this sort of entertainment. If there weren't, sales of the videocassettes wouldn't have been so high. *The Secret Of NIMH* video sales stayed in or near the Top 10 for many months. But it was with *Dragon's Lair*, the first animated laser disk game, that we really turned new soil. When it was released in July 1983, it became an instant smash hit. All throughout the arcades, we found the audiences that *NIMH* had missed. There were the teenagers, and mature young adults too, all crowded around the *Dragon's Lair* machines.

The impact of animation is special. You can say things with the medium you can't say any other way. Many times, people are more susceptible to the messages coming from anthropomorphic representations of themselves and their acquaintances than they are with real life actors. Animation makes an indelible impression on your psyche, it's unforgettable.

SPOTLIGHT on Animators

Teamwork

The animation team that worked on *NIMH, Dragon's Lair*, and *Space Ace*, is dwarfed in comparison to the current size of many animation studio rosters. But, **big** is the studio way, and with **big** comes the spreading out of all the employees into private rooms. In this environment, the artists tend to become elitist and territorial, thus, alienating the team spirit. Personally, I prefer the open arrangement of a newsroom. All story and character discussions are easily circulated. Everyone in the room is privy to the director's discussions. Even more rewarding is what the animation staff gains as they begin helping each other with their scenes, and this happens in odd ways. Kevin Wurzer, for example, owned a pet rat named Sweet William, which he graciously brought into the room for all to study. Of course, it would never do for the rat to run freely around. For that reason, the whole team pitched in and built an elaborate catwalk system near the ceiling so Sweet William could have his daily exercise. In essence, the interest in the pampered rodent helped the animator's focus their attention, and as a consequence, the movements of the *Rats Of NIMH* grew incredibly more entertaining. But on one occasion, William's theatrics were not appreciated. A very renowned celebrity was touring the studio. The animators had dressed William in his new coat and hat, and he was unusually excited. So, you can imagine his disappointment when Julie Andrews walked into the bullpen, took one look at William, and vociferated a scream that blew the poor rodent from the catwalk. "My God," she panted in the hall, "there's a rat in there!" "Yes, we know," I said, "he's our model, he teaches us how rats move." "Well, isn't that's just lover-ly," she smiled, "can we move on."



Thanks for the Memories

Whether making animated features or arcade games, the agony of production can occasionally drive you over the edge. When you're frenzied in the middle of a creative battle, and artistic tempers are exploding like fragment bombs, or the accountants have parked themselves in your office and prattle endlessly on about budget deficits, you might need to remind yourself that your original intention was to create something beautiful, a moment of splendor, or even a hardy laugh, all elements that can lighten life's burdens. In hindsight, the fond memories of the special people that I've teamed with over the years, the people who have soldiered the battles victoriously, are even more deserving of my affection than that bestowed upon the product we made. I know the names of past employees will fade, but God willing, the faces locked in my memory will not. So, out there in that battlefield of fading memories and forgotten dreams, I just realized I may have forgotten to say thank you, the pleasure was all mine. Remember, what we did together was never just for the money.

WOMEN, GET THE VOTE

Prior to 1979, men dominated the animation business. Women's jobs were relegated to assistants, color stylists, inkers, or painters, a situation not unlike the unfair theatre practices in Shakespeare's day, an era when only men were allowed perform on stage. If memory serves correctly, it was during the animating of *Pete's Dragon* that the seeds of change were sown. Four rookies, Linda Miller, Lorna Pomeroy, Emily Juliano, and Heidi Guedel, pitted their artistic muscles against the existing masculine animation prowess, and kicked ass. Well, that blew a hole in the bow of tradition, and into the studios, poured a fresh stable of feminine talent with sharp pencils and even sharper wits, aspiring to new opportunities. So, how did this affect the business? Dramatically!

Animation ceased being a men's club. Opposing ideas from the two sexes came together onto the big screen. The result was a hybrid that resonated clearly on both sides of the room. Furthermore, the simpleminded, half-witted, heroine of the past vanished.

On *Dragons Lair*, four of our thirteen animators were women. Daphne's air-headed demeanor, to them, had been like pouring salt on a wound. I agreed to upgrade the heroine, Kimberly, in *Space Ace*, to a perky, Harvard, straight A junior on spring break. "In addition to that," I continued, "why don't we cast one of you as Kimberly's voice. You can mold her into anything you want." Without giving it a second thought, Lorna Pomeroy jumped at the chance. With that, she had my ear for six months, bless her heart!

I have no regrets though, the women were right.

THE COLORS OF ACE

An outpost in space where Borf rules.

Dexter, the nerd, is about to crash his spaceship.

Dexter is about to be sucked into the neutralizing beam.

Dexter transforms into the hero, Ace.

As Ace, he is empowered with more agility and higher points.

In the checkerboard tunnel, Ace is confronted by obstacles.

Ace finds impressing Kimberly is the hardest game of all.

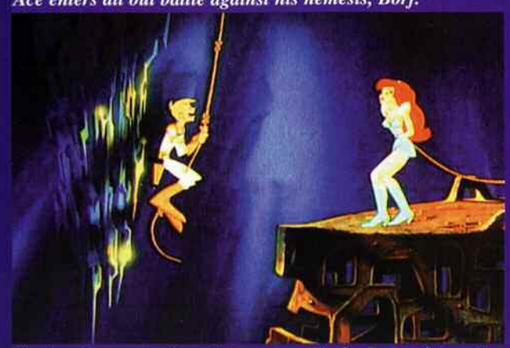
Where *NIMH* is a sophisticated story with subtle plot twists, *Space Ace* is a broad comedy with outrageous, and silly gags. *NIMH'S* colors are conservative. The colors of *Space Ace* accost the senses boldly. They push your buttons to give you an adrenalin rush. The comedy is a cartoon, and therefore uses raw color right from the tube, whereas the feature film gains its power through a subtle color palette, and artistic restraint.

Even a spin on his neutron space bike doesn't help.

Borf prepares to shoot the Infanto ray gun.

Ace enters all out battle against his nemesis, Borf.

Ace's greatest foe is his dark side, who launches an attack.



Dexter, the nerd, attempts to rescue Kimberly, Borf's captive.

Ace and Borf engage in a battle to the death.

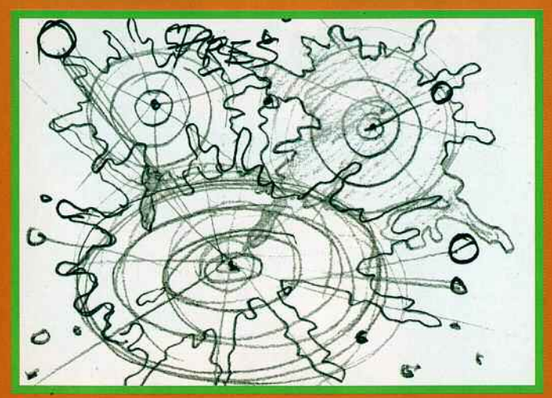
Borf fires the Infanto ray gun at the unsuspecting Ace.

The ray backfires and Borf morph's into a tiny baby.

Shop Talk

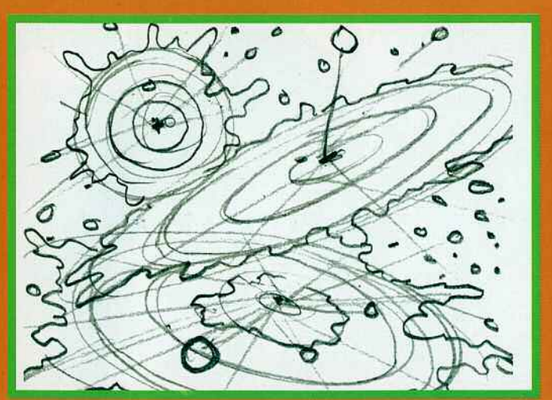
The thrill of the hunt, the challenge of visualization with rough sketches and notes, the rhythm, tone, and action of the finished movie you see projected on the mental screen inside your head, is the daunting task of Story Boarding. Often, the visions and sounds emanating from your fancy are ephemeral. They are wisps of smoke, here then gone. Therefore, I like to work quickly, making small, dirt-rough drawings. I never concentrate on doing good sketches on the first pass, but place my focus instead, on the emotional power that emerges from my imagination. With each new sketch, I ask myself the same two questions: what am I trying to say, and what do I want the audience to feel? If I can't answer these two questions, I'm not ready to draw, I put the pencil down.

NARR: WELCOME TO STORYTIME SYMPHONY . . .
TITLE COLORS MELT AWAY MORPHING TO THE TITLE, THE HAPPY PRINCE

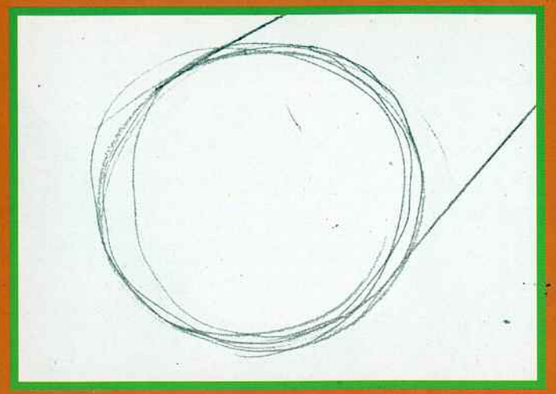


THE VIOLINS BEGIN A SOFT TREMELO, THE CELLOS BEGIN THE HAPPY PRINCE THEME
NARR: TODAY OUR STORY IS...

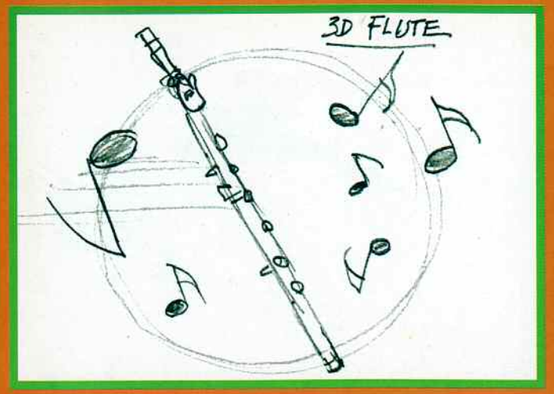
A SPOTLIGHT APPEARS ON THE BLUE BACKGROUND, AWAITING THE STAR, THE FLUTE.
NARR: . . . THE HAPPY PRINCE BY OSCAR WILDE.



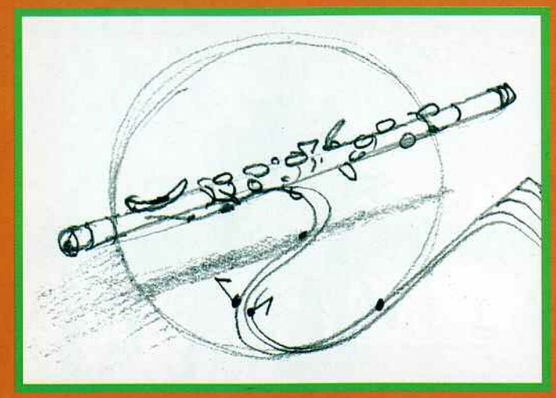
TITLE MELTS AWAY LIKE SPREADING COLORS, LEAVING A DARK BLUE.
NARR: IT WILL BE TOLD BY THE FLUTE.



MUSIC ANTICIPATES FLUTE'S ENTRANCE. (A BEAT) - STILL NO FLUTE - THE SPOTLIGHT SEARCHES THE SCREEN.
NARR: (AHEM!) THE FLUTE.



FLUTE DARTS ON STAGE WITH A DISCHORDANT SQUACK, EMBARRASSED.



FLUTE PLAYS THE SWALLOW'S THEME.

SPOTLIGHT LEAVES THE FLUTE AND FOLLOWS THE STAFF AND NOTES. MUSIC STAFF PANS LEFT AS WE SEE A VISUAL OF THE WRITTEN MELODY.

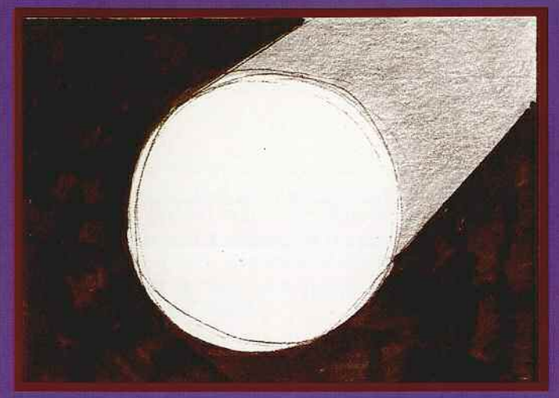
The Prelude

This term means something that goes before. First, read the script, then think about the characters. Next, reread the script and again, think about the characters. Later, talk about the characters personalities with someone whose instincts you trust. You can not convincingly draw a character you don't understand anymore than you can talk on a subject you know little about. You will get caught in a lie. The rule of thumb is to know your cast and what makes each of them tick at their core. Call on your own experience of people to gain understanding of characters on the scripted page. Get inside the playwright's head. Why did he write the story? What is he trying to say? Oscar Wilde wrote *The Happy Prince* because he was feeling what emotion? Whatís the point of his story? I'm asking myself these questions because they become the foundation upon which to build a clear and entertaining board. Boarding, you see, in the purest sense is like directing. Before you can make those little story sketches, you have to take on some director-like decisions: the editing of the picture, the camera angles, the lighting of each scene, the amount of information you want your audience to get with each scene, and the pace of the movie. Now, since this is too many pennies to spin all at once, I always simplify my approach. On the first pass, I concentrate on two things only, the cutting and the camera angles. With the second pass, I pay more attention to the information being fed to the audience, as well as the lighting. Finally, on the third pass, I will either focus on the timing, or the pace of the action.

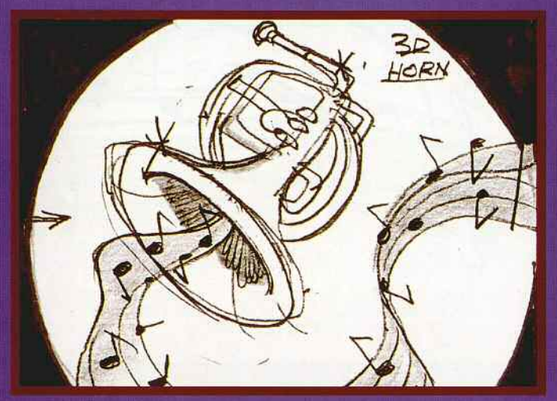
The Drawings

These little devils will birth when they are good and ready, never before. I always put off the pencil and paper dance until I've had time to sit with all the ideas. Find a quiet place.

A NOTE MORPHS INTO THE SWALLOW WHO FLIES OVER THE STAFF AND BREAKS IT UP. ONCE AGAIN, THE SCREEN BECOMES DARK, THIS TIME RED.



THE SPOT POPS ON.
NARR: AND ALSO BY THE FRENCH HORN.



THE HORN GLISTENS IN THE LIGHT AS A REGAL MELODY SPRINGS FORTH TO PAINT THE STATUE OF THE HAPPY PRINCE. THE GOLD OF THE HORN KEYS THE GOLD LEAF OF THE STATUE.

THE NOTES CONCENTRATE, FORMING A YOUTHFUL FIGURE IN GOLD LEAF. PRINCE IS 3-D AND ROTATES 180° TO SHOW US HIS FACE.
NARR: HIGH ABOVE THE CITY ON A TALL COLUMN, STOOD THE STATUE...

Can you see the movie you want in your head, if only pieces of it already finished? Don't try to edit yourself at this stage. Keep observing the mental phantasmagoria. The child in you will scream with delight when you get close to a fabulous idea. When you think you have snagged a big one, draw it! Stay rough. Be prepared for disappointment; something is always lost in the translation. Usually, serendipity kicks in and you'll find some surprises as you sketch.

Remember that a movie is a long piece of film, about seven miles in length, in which still pictures are lined up in the order they are to be presented to the viewer. In the boarding process, you are deciding that order. The power a film has to move an audience is determined by the way the story information is fed to them, and also the rate. Give the audience too much information too soon, and your movie becomes predictable and boring. Hold back. You want to make you're audience curious. Keep them guessing till the last frame. Indeed, a good example of this is *The Sixth Sense*. Who knew the ending, I sure didn't!

Labeling

Someone will have to interpret your boards. For that reason, you will need a system. Find a format for the numbering, as well as the descriptions, and stick to it. Sketch numbers are always located in the bottom left corner. Place descriptions and dialogs under the sketch. Confine camera instructions to the top of the sketch. It doesn't matter what pattern you follow, be consistent though. Somewhere, there is a labeling bogeyman assigned to destroy all of the slobs, so watch out!

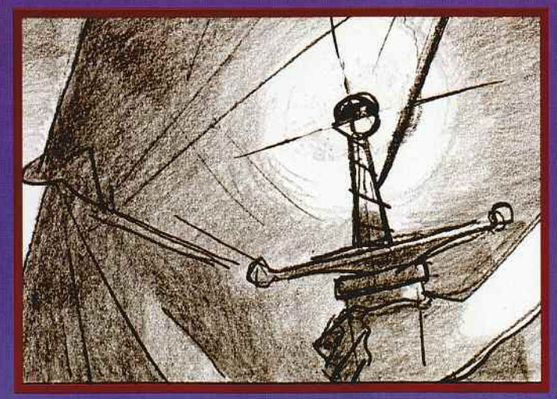
Scrutiny

This is requires humility. You want to rid your board of any weak ideas, and you may be too subjective to recognize them for yourself. So, while you're still in the rough mode, pitch your boards to fresh eyes. Usually, this is a lot of fun. If you are with the right people, many more ideas will come bubbling forth throughout the session. You may even find yourself moving away from what you originally visualized. Be flexible. Stay in the discovery mode. Nothing in your boards should be chiseled in stone. Don't be a brat and get defensive. The scrutiny process is not an attack on you personally, it's a way of reaching for the stars instead of settling for the moon. A fabulous concept will sell itself. If you get stubborn, a bad idea could go all the way to color. This hurts not only the movie, but also your reputation. Strive for the ability to listen calmly to another point of view. You may develop an allergy to the scrutinizing part of the process and want to skip it altogether. All I can say is, don't. Be inspired, and flow with an energy that is bigger than self.

The Beats

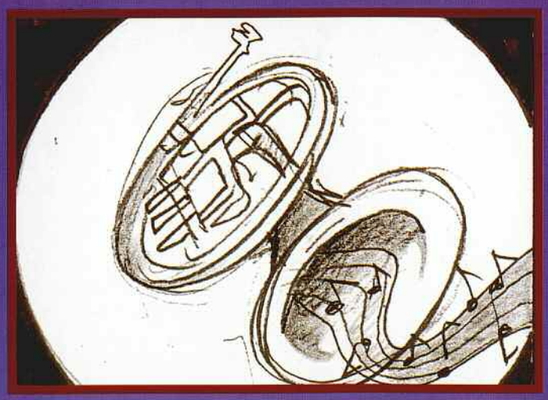
This is a term that is used frequently in script writing and story boarding. It has to do with timing. Oddly enough, musicians employ the same term. Music is metered out in a line up of notes and delivered to the human ear in a beat pattern. Story telling is similar. It is a line up of ideas or messages, which is delivered to the senses in a beat pattern, either fast or slow. For example, in *The Secret of NIMH*, The Great Owl slowly turns and stares down at Mrs. Brisby. He is silent for a beat, then speaks, "Why are you here?" The term "beat" is used to show the passing of time as the owl sizes up the situation. When the beat of a movie picks up speed, we are usually in a moment of extreme tension or high adrenaline. Even your heart pumps to a beat, and occasionally, it may skip one if you are suddenly startled.

NARR: ...OF THE HAPPY PRINCE. HE WAS GILTED WITH THIN LEAVES OF GOLD.



NARR: AND A LARGE RUBY GLOWED ON THE HILT OF HIS SWORD.

CAM: PAN DOWN TO REVEAL THE RUBY
NARR: ...AND FOR EYES HE HAD TWO BRIGHT SAPPHIRES,



FRENCH HORN PLAYS THE COUNCILOR THEME.

CAM: X-DISS

CAM: TRUCK IN TO CITY COUNCILORS.
NARR: HE WAS VERY MUCH ADMIRED INDEED.

NARR/COUNCILOR: HE IS AS BEAUTIFUL AS A WEATHERCOCK, ONLY NOT QUITE SO USEFUL.

CAM: X-DISS

CAM: X-DISS

NARR/WOMAN: WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE THE HAPPY PRINCE? HE NEVER CRIES FOR ANYTHING.

THE BASSOON PLAYS AS IT ROTATES.

LIGHTING

Once you feel confident about the editing (The Beats), and your camera angles (Rough Sketches), you can dive into deeper waters which involves, the lighting of the sketches. You may use any medium that suits your fancy, I prefer markers and pastels. Seldom, will I draw a rough sketch, except to improve a camera angle. Those first-tossed drawings have soul in them, and redrawing them cleaner will often lose something. For example, drawing number sixteen is not an accurate rendition of the French horn. But at this point, who cares, those details will come later. For now, it is an indication of where I would like to go. Besides, none of these story board drawings will be in the final movie anyway. Did you know that there's a similar notion in the acting profession? When in rehearsal mode, the actors frequently hold back. They save the real performance for the moment the director says, "Action," and the camera rolls. There are three good reasons to light the story sketches: one, it will make them better looking from an animation standpoint, and since many people will need to know your vision for the movie before itís finished, I believe it is the way to go; two, the lighting will queue the effects animators; they can then begin to calculate their workload, remember, things like contact shadows, shadow mattes, highlights, sparkles, and focus for the scene, will all have to be scheduled and budgeted; three, the color key artist can now get in on the act. Over the page you will see some sketches that have been painted. These little miniature "Monets" really nail the emotional impact a scene will have.

Color Keys

In the realm of music, each note of the scale vibrates at its own frequency, the faster the vibration the higher the pitch. Each note, when played alone, is pure and powerful, but when two notes are coupled together and vibrate at the same time, a new sound is created that is either pleasant or terrible. For example, Do, Mi, Sol, and La are all fabulous together. Conversely, Do and Re sounding at the same time creates

A MISERABLE BEGGAR LOOKS UP TO SAY?
NARR/BEGGAR: I'M GLAD THERE'S SOMEONE IN THE WORLD THAT'S QUITE HAPPY.

CAM: X-DISS

CAM: TRUCK IN

HARP GLISSANDO BEGINS JAUNTY CHILDREN'S THEME...

dissonance, and I think I prefer fingernails scraping on a blackboard to the awful sound of Mi and Fa vibrating together. Anyway, the pairing up of sound vibrations, in theory, can also apply to the mixing together of two or more colors. In the color modem, opposites attract. Blue likes to stand next to yellow. Green adores red. A skilled color stylist is as inspiring an artist as a great composer, and just as rare. The stylist teams the colors around a central theme to create a mellifluous symphony of visual delights that bombard the psyche with ever ascending orgasmic splendor. In other words, "WOW!" Maybe, herein lies part of the attraction for 2-D animation, that is, its brilliant saturation of color. Indeed, you can decide for yourself, but for now, it's got my vote.

The Focus

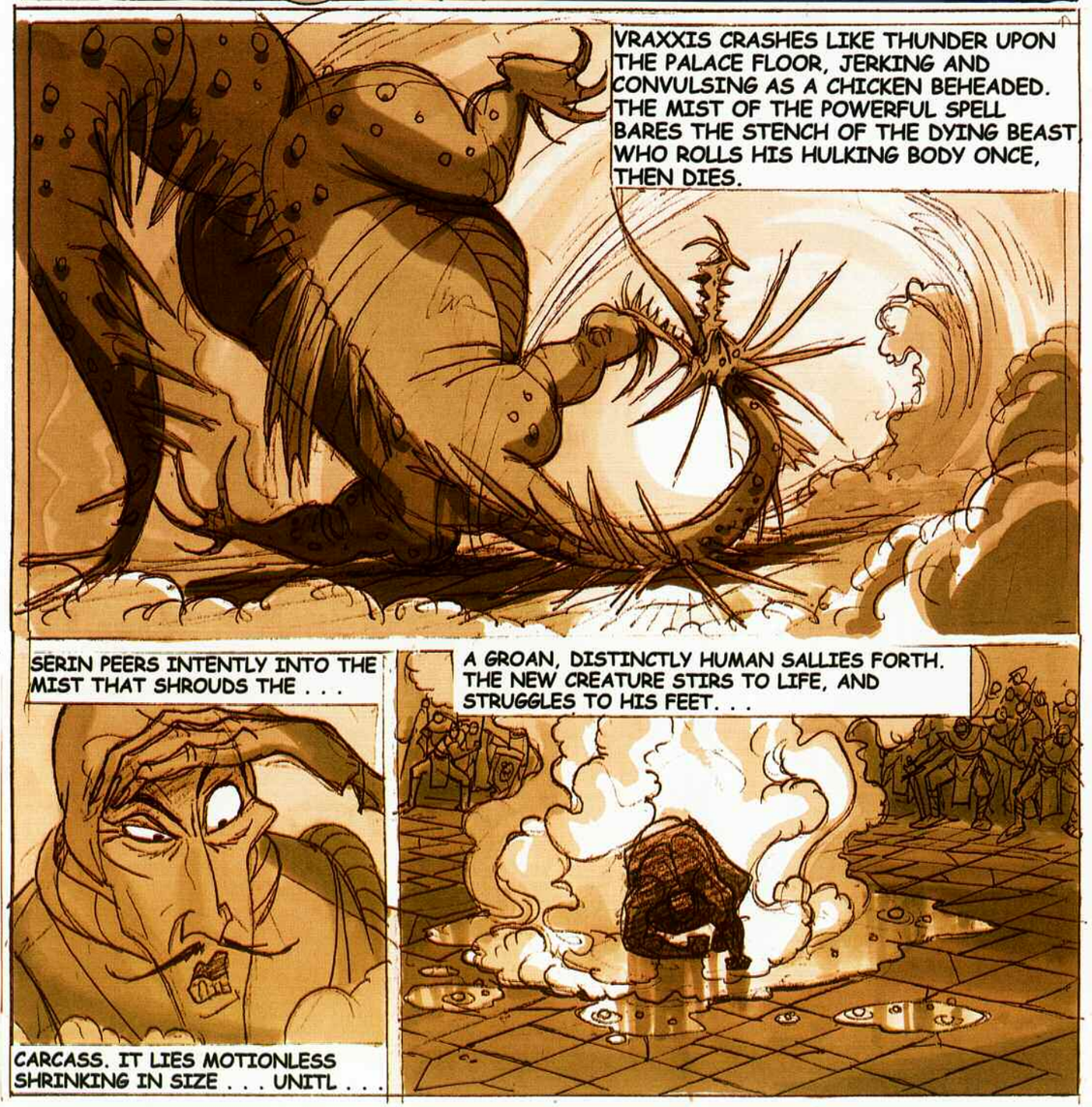
An actor stands alone on a dark stage. Suddenly, a small spotlight clicks on, illuminating just his face. Where will you look? At his face, of course. That is the focal point of that moment. When I saw *My Fair Lady* on stage, Julie Andrews whirled suddenly into the richly decorated study of Professor Higgins. She was very much upstaged by the brilliant sets of Oliver Smith, with their floral patterns, fringed drapes and antique chairs. I wasn't sure where to look, but the orchestra was frolicking its way through the introduction to the song, *I Could Have Danced All Night.* I suddenly knew I was being told by the strings to look at her. Somehow, I knew she was about to sing. As the stage lighting dimmed to a deep saturated royal blue, the details of the set receded and a small spot bathed Miss Andrew's face in a delicate amber light. This is where I want you to look, the lights were saying as if they could speak. At that moment, I felt the guiding hand of a clever director focusing my attention. And so, every scene needs a focal point, and so does ever sketch. Keep that in mind. The color stylist will build upon this. Help your audience to know where to look. Can you identify the focus of the color key on these pages?

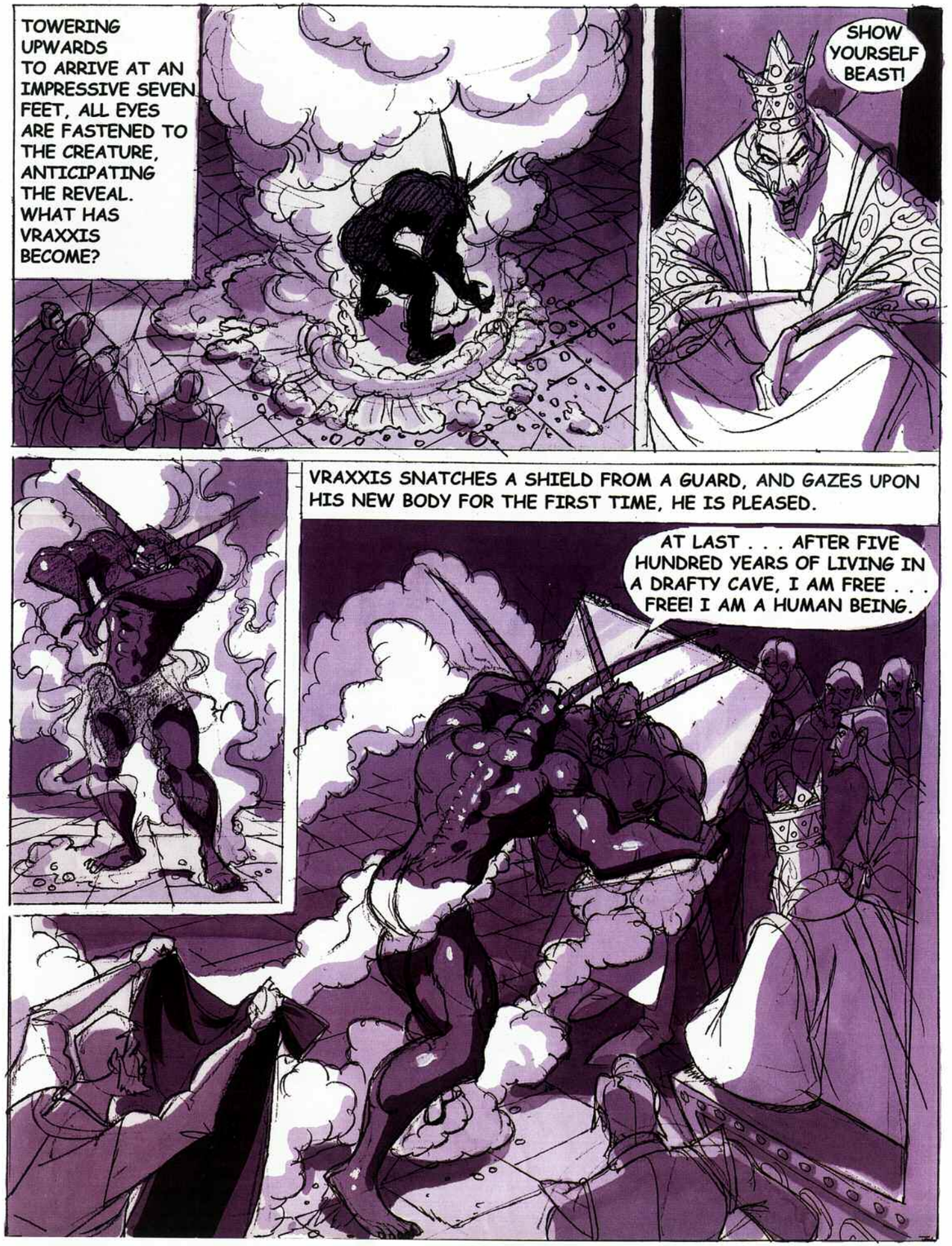
CHARITY CHILDREN EXIT THE CATHEDRAL IN THEIR BRIGHT SCARLET CLOAKS...

...AND THEIR WHITE PINAFORES.
CHILDREN: HE LOOKS LIKE AN ANGEL.

...TO BE CONTINUED

DRAGON'S LAIR
REIGN OF TERROR
EPISODE III


VRAXXIS CRASHES LIKE THUNDER UPON THE PALACE FLOOR, JERKING AND CONVULSING AS A CHICKEN BEHEADED. THE MIST OF THE POWERFUL SPELL BARES THE STENCH OF THE DYING BEAST WHO ROLLS HIS HULKING BODY ONCE, THEN DIES.
SERIN PEERS INTENTLY INTO THE MIST THAT SHROUDS THE . . .
CARCASS. IT LIES MOTIONLESS SHRINKING IN SIZE . . . UNITL . . .
A GROAN, DISTINCTLY HUMAN SALLIES FORTH. THE NEW CREATURE STIRS TO LIFE, AND STRUGGLES TO HIS FEET. . .


TOWERING UPWARDS TO ARRIVE AT AN IMPRESSIVE SEVEN FEET, ALL EYES ARE FASTENED TO THE CREATURE, ANTICIPATING THE REVEAL. WHAT HAS VRAXXIS BECOME?
SHOW YOURSELF BEAST!
VRAXXIS SNATCHES A SHIELD FROM A GUARD, AND GAZES UPON HIS NEW BODY FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE IS PLEASED.
AT LAST . . . AFTER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF LIVING IN A DRAFTY CAVE, I AM FREE . . . FREE! I AM A HUMAN BEING.

THERE IS ONE CATCH . . . IT'S ABOUT YOUR TEMPER. . .

TEMPER!! WHAT ABOUT MY TEMPER? I HOPE THAT'S NOT A COMPLAINT.

VRAXXIS, IN A BURST OF MOCKING LAUGHTER, SNATCHES THE KING, SHAKING HIM LIKE A RAG DOLL.

LOSE YOUR TEMPER AND THE SPELL WILL BE BROKEN FOREVER. YOU'LL BE A DRAGON PERMANENTLY.

VRAXXIS SLAMS SERIN ONTO HIS THRONE, HIS BREATH BLASTS HIS FACE.

ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD KNOW?

JUST HOW GRATEFUL I AM FOR YOUR HELP. NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I HAVE A KINGDOM TO FLEECE.

THERE IS A SMILE, EVER SO FAINT ON THE CREATURE'S FACE, AS HE STORMS AWAY TOWARD THE DOOR.

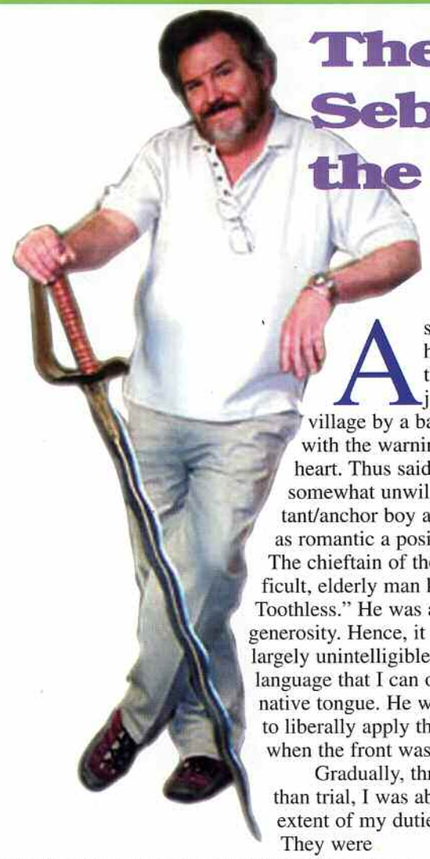
THEN. . .SUDDENLY VRAXXIS TURNS, AND IN ONE SLOW DELIBERATE GESTURE, VOID OF ANY EMOTION . . .

BRINGS THE REIGN OF SERIN, THE ALCHEMIST TO AN UNTIMELY CLOSE.

Don Bluth

. . . to be continued

The Pitch



The Tale of Sebastian the Thief

PART II

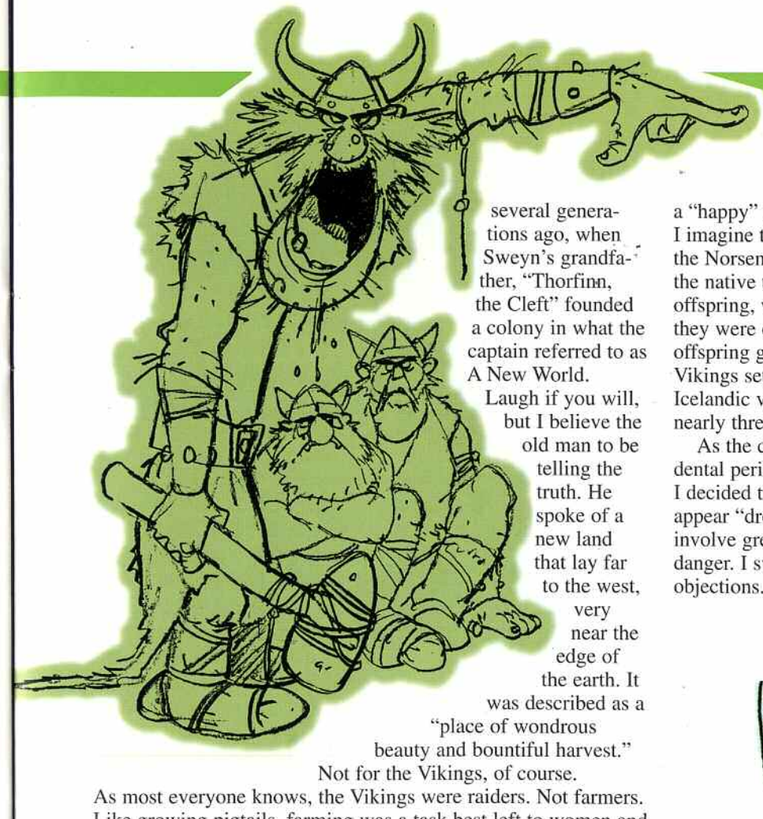
As translated by John Lakey

As you may recall from our first encounter, my childhood was one wrecked with misfortune, misadventure and strife. The long and short of it being, that just prior to my fifteenth year, I was taken from my village by a band of Viking raiders. As I continue my tale, it is with the warning that it is not a story for the faint of heart. Thus said, I will tell you that in 1160 I was thrust somewhat unwillingly into the life of cooks assistant/anchor boy aboard ship. It was not nearly as romantic a position as one would imagine. The chieftain of these scruffy raiders was a difficult, elderly man known as "Sweyn , the Toothless." He was a fellow not easily given to generosity. Hence, it was his practice to shout largely unintelligible orders in a guttural language that I can only assume was his native tongue. He was further known to liberally apply the back of his hand, when the front was unavailable.

Gradually, through more error than trial, I was able to deduce the extent of my duties. They were twofold; first, should the ship's anchor become lodged behind or below a submerged, or encrusted object, I was to dive into the fjord or glacial bay and set the anchor free. I must say, of my two duties, this was by far, my favorite. As I would go about my task, the crew was given to gathering about and shouting encouragement through the hole in the ice. It is my belief that we all need encouragement from time to time, particularly if one happens to become entangled in kelp, or eels.

My second, and decidedly less favorite duty was that of "taster/chewer" to the captain. In this capacity, I served in a role somewhat similar to that of a mother bird provider. For all our sakes, I will delve no further into this matter, other than to say that here too, the crew tended to shout encouragement.

It was during his morning feeding, that the captain began relating a story that I found very strange indeed, and one that I feel bares repeating. It began



several generations ago, when Sweyn's grandfather, "Thorfinn, the Cleft" founded a colony in what the captain referred to as A New World.

Laugh if you will, but I believe the old man to be telling the truth. He spoke of a new land that lay far to the west, very near the edge of the earth. It was described as a "place of wondrous beauty and bountiful harvest."

Not for the Vikings, of course. As most everyone knows, the Vikings were raiders. Not farmers. Like growing pigtails, farming was a task best left to women and unfortunately, for the crew, no women had been willing to accompanied them on this voyage. More than anyone, I understood their point of view.

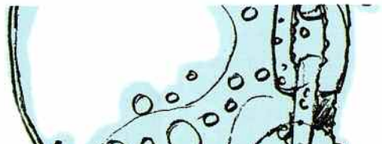
Ah, but I digress and for that I ask your forgiveness. Still, I think in short order it will become clear how this bizarre story relates directly to my own. To wit, I don't believe that the Thornfinn Vikings ever founded any sort of colony. From my knowledge of the group, they would have been fortunate to find a colony, let alone establish one. Rather, I would suggest that this crew became shipwrecked in the new world and there they remained for nearly forty years. The Norsemen, as noted, were raiders, not ship builders. That too was best to the women.

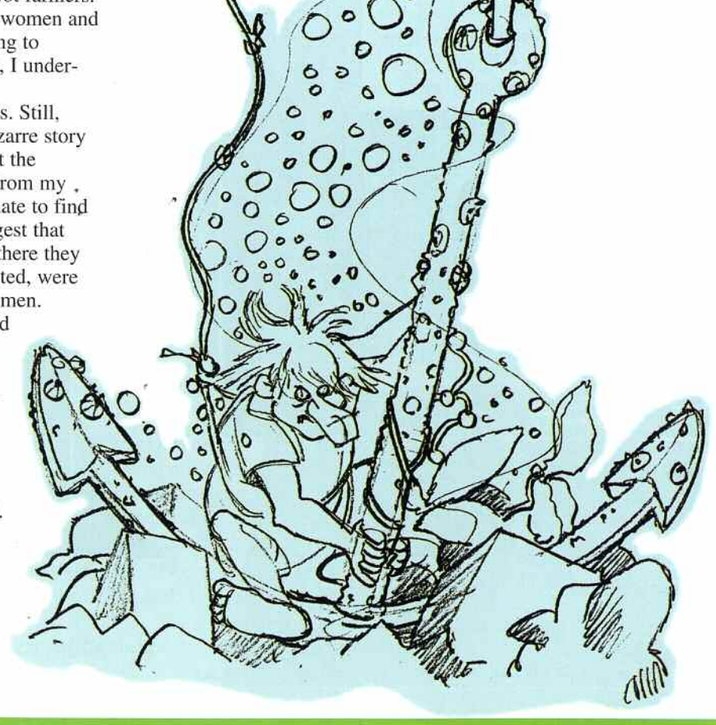
At any rate, these must have been lean times indeed for the rape and pillage trade. The Vikings were ill equipped for life in this hostile land. Further, it is my understanding, that this new world was already populated by a race of somewhat savage red men. The Norsemen referred to these fierce warriors as the "Verteferni," meaning roughly "one who lives in a warm, dry hut and has a full belly." After their third winter, only the larger, cannibalistic Vikings survived. Desperate, these pirates went against all tradition, finally engaging in the lowest form of human behavior, barter.

In exchange for grog, the savages instructed the survivors in how to exist in this new land. They learned how to gather edible bark, grubs and viable carrion. Old Sweyn related that the Verteferni always seemed a "happy" people and laughed a great deal. Given the situation, I imagine this to be true. Apparently, after some years of trade, the Norsemen were allowed to marry select, ugly members of the native tribes. In due course, they sired offspring. Strong, ugly offspring, with the broad backs and shoulders of oarsmen, yet they were of little use without a ship. Gradually, as the female offspring grew to adulthood, a new ship was constructed and the Vikings set out for home. In route, they raided my own pitiful Icelandic village. It had been their first foray into pillaging in nearly three generations, still, they had not lost the knack.

As the captain burbled on about attacking England and the dental perils of eating tree bark, I formulated my own plan. I decided that once we reached my native England, I would appear "drowned" in a fatal anchor mishap. My escape would involve great risk, But my freedom would be well worth the danger. I swallowed hard at the prospect over the captain's loud objections.

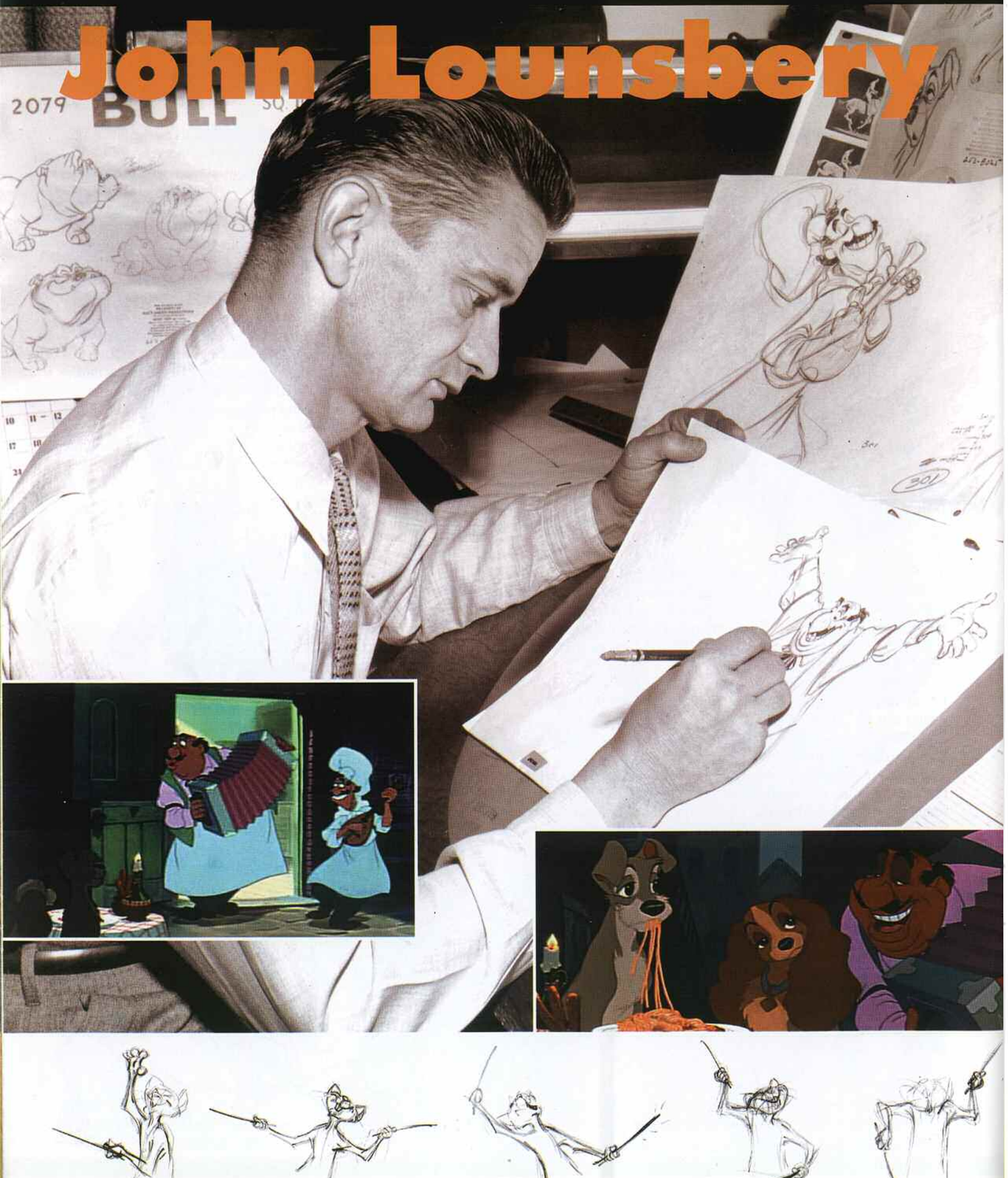
. . . to be continued





WIZARDS *of the* BIZ

John Lounsbery



I was eighteen, starry eyed, and broke when I passed through the security gates at Walt Disney Productions, and stepped into the bullpen with five other rookies where for one month, I practiced inbetweening. *Sleeping Beauty* was the current studio production, but I practiced on already established characters like Alice, The Cheshire Cat, Goofy, Donald Duck, and of course, Mickey. One glorious morning, Johnny Bond, the company sentinel, with his never-lit-half-chewed-cigar hanging from his lip, unexpectedly arrived at my desk. "Come with me Bluthman," he commanded. Bond had two unique idiosyncrasies, he never called anyone by his/her right name, and he never wore his teeth on the job. "You're a lucky guy," he said, "you've been assigned to Louns." He led me through the long hallway of B wing to the last room. Workers stood in their doorways gawking while I shook hands with a very intense, slender-built man in his 50's. "Bluthman," said Bond, "this is Louns." The animator studied me for a beat, offered a slight grin and said, "Welcome aboard." There was a desperate tone in his voice as he continued, "we need all the help we can get."

Odd remark, I thought to myself as I was ushered to my own room in B wing. Here, at the most glorious and capable Mecca of animation brilliance in the world, they need help? I soon learned that John Lounsbery was referring to *Sleeping Beauty*, the animation landmark of the fifties. Things were changing. The soft, traditional Disney style art was fading, and in its place, a distinctly modern, angular style was emerging. At the time, no one was aware of how much influence the *Sleeping Beauty* technique would have upon every other animated picture thereafter. The movie was a benchmark in animations evolutionary history, and cost nearly as much as William Wyler's *Ben Hur*.

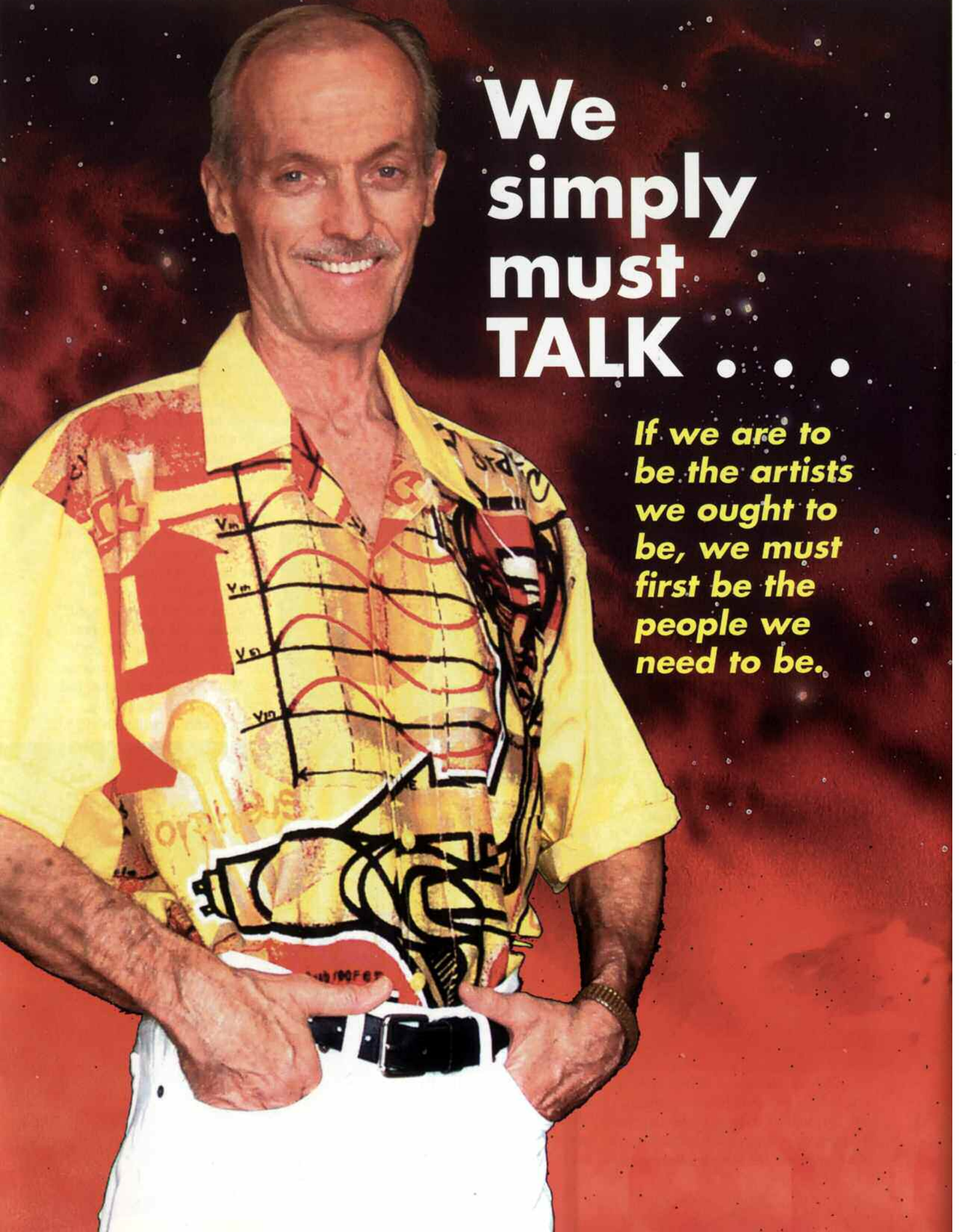
During that same year, Walt was absent from the studio much of the time; he was constructing the theme park in Anaheim, California. His animators were puzzling their way through the *Sleeping Beauty* project with a mere twenty percent of Walt's attention. But then, Louns always loved a challenge. Even in the days of *Snow White*, Louns threw his hat into the ring and learned the craft when he saw what the animator, Norm Ferguson, was able to do with the Wicked Witch. Fergie, as he was called, was Lounsbery first mentor, and now he was mine. And so it was, I became a rough inbetweener in John's unit. Someone must have observed the lack of sweat on my brow

for over the next six months, I got bumped up several times to greater responsibilities. Finally, I was moved into the room adjacent to John's, and became his assistant.

It was first whispered behind closed doors, then said aloud in the halls, Don has been taken under Louns wing. There was a sour tone in that remark which led me to believe that I had bruised several artists' egos on my way up, artists who had been aspiring for such an opportunity for years. John saw this and laughed it off. "Pay no attention to them," he said, "God gave you a talent, and you had better use it."

In the weeks that followed, John told me stories from the past, gave me information about the art, and encouraged me to animate a scene of my own. As a teacher, he was absolutely brilliant; the best I've ever known. I used to see myself as King Arthur, and he was my mentor, Merlin, compassionate but strict, always demanding the best. Now, when he himself sat down to draw, I would often peek over his shoulder. What a trip that was! One day, I just blurted out "I don't know how you do that! How did you get to be so good?" He blushed and smiled, "I practiced," he said. "You will get it too. Don, You will even pass me up. You'll be able to do this, and more." Now, I was blushing.

John Lounsbery died in 1976. Ultimately, his accomplishments at Disney span several decades; only a smattering of his work is pictured here. In the animation world, John was a giant. There's an old proverb that says, If you stand on the backs of giants, you can see further than the giants. One thing is for sure, I've never felt equal to his colossal talents. I still see myself as the Wart, and he will always be my Merlin.



ToonUp 2000

Hey buds below
Up is where to grow.
Up is where below
Can't compare with
Hurry, it's lovely
Up here.

This lyric from a song by Alan J. Lerner pretty much describes the human dilemma and also the challenge. Dormant, we slumber beneath a cover of illusion and despair, while the voice of a kind mentor bids us to awaken and ascend to the glorious light above. That's easy to say, but hard to do. Ascending into the rare is just plain old hard work.

It isn't enough to hope
It isn't enough to dream
It isn't enough to worry
Plot and scheme.

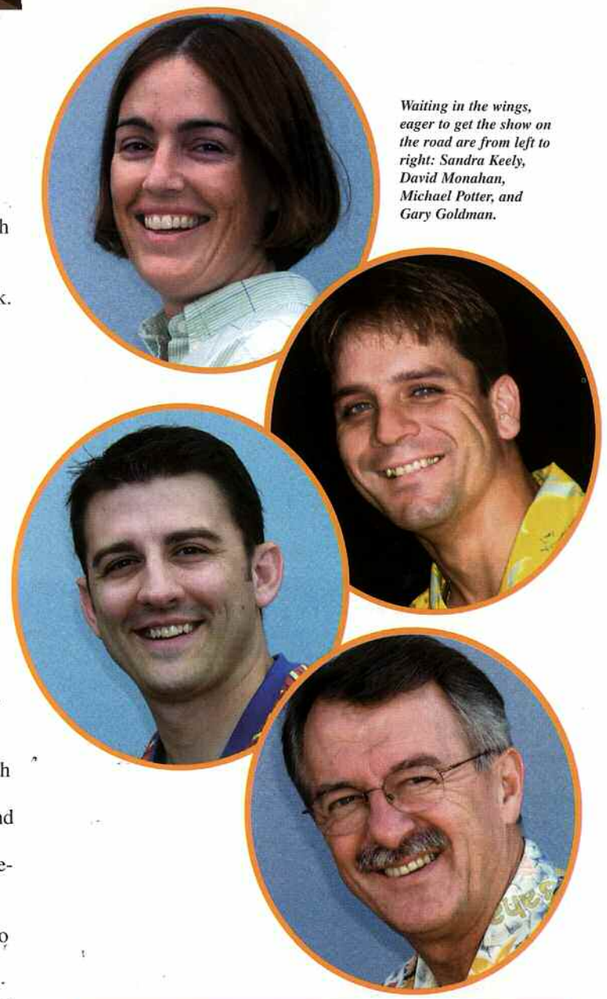
It isn't enough to sit there
Having a purple fit there
Thinking the world is going to
Show up.
It isn't enough to hope and dream.

–Anthony Newley

Change is always difficult, and troubling. It is fraught with emotional barriers. It can be scary. But, everyone needs to grow. That compelling feeling to embrace new ideas is always born out of inspiration. It could be a piece of music, a book, a teacher, or even a snippet from a t.v. show. Whatever the source, our acquisition of knowledge and wisdom is key to our personal fulfillment. God bless those that inspire us. Okay, I'm sounding a bit pompous here, but it is worth the risk, we simply must talk!

So many of the animation forums these days focus on the trends and financial opportunities of the art. In **ToonUp 2000**, we will spotlight the art itself. I keep seeing young artists entering the job market somewhat unprepared, confident that their art college diploma did it for them, end of story. But, mastering of any discipline requires passion, vigilance, and perseverance, it's not a one time thing. A musician who tunes his instrument before a concert, also tunes during the performance. **ToonUp 2000** will address the ongoing improvement of your animation skills with the hope of kicking your virtuosity up a notch or two. In the final analysis, your value as an artist will not be measured by the money you make, but by the dreams you give to us. It will do you no good to school yourself in the skill of drawing if in your heart you have nothing to offer. If we are to be the artists we ought to be, we must first be the people we need to be, and that starts with education. We simply must talk.

During the three day seminar, we will explore the following subjects: drawing and character design; storyboard and directing; as well as, acting and animation. At present, we are still working out the details of the venue. We'll keep you informed once you've signed up for the show. See you there!



Waiting in the wings, eager to get the show on the road are from left to right: Sandra Keely, David Monahan, Michael Potter, and Gary Goldman.

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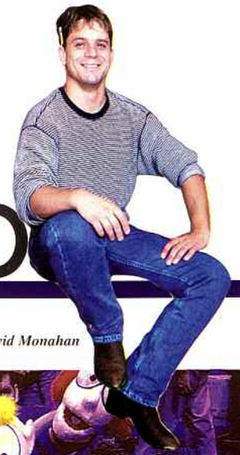
editor's scoop



David Monahan

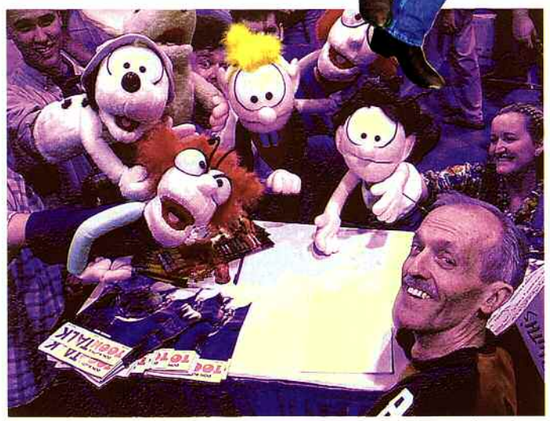
On behalf of the crew at *ToonTalk*, I would like to thank everybody who waited patiently to meet Don Bluth and Gary Goldman at San Diego Comic Con 2000. You can be assured that Don Bluth's team will be at Comic Con 2001 with even more entertainment. Many of the people that visited our booth at Comic Con this year learned first hand of our future Internet projects. Soon, our existing website **www.donbluth.com** will receive a fresh and colorful facelift, and our second site **www.donbluthstoontalk.com** will be going online for the first time. So, if you're an animation enthusiast, now is the time to invest in a computer if you haven't already got one!

Over the next few weeks, **www.donbluth.com** will be greatly enhanced to include the first interactive *Dragon's Lair* webisode. Visitors to the site will have control over Dirk's destiny as he battles to save the moon from the evil clutches of Mordrock. If that doesn't tantalize you, maybe watching Don draw live on the Web, will. Anybody with an Internet service can watch Don create drawings from the upcoming webisodes in the comfort of their homes. Furthermore, if visitors follow the future links to **www.donbluthstoontalk.com.**, they can watch many basic and advanced animation principals from the lessons at Don's Academy of Animation. If you miss some of the live shows, you can return to any lesson by following the links to our archive page. There is also a highly instructional web page that incorporates the production process of Don's version of *The Happy Prince.* This will be an in-depth analysis of how an animated production is assembled from beginning to end.

Truly, there's a treasure of information in both of these websites. Additionally, if there are any questions regarding the content exhibited on these sites, simply navigate to the message board and discover when Don and Gary will be chatting online with a live audience.

Well, there you have it! As you can see, we certainly have been busy bringing you more magical adventures. Hope to see you online!

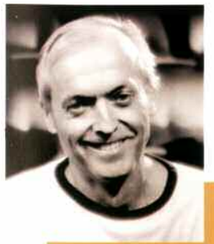
–Dave



Surprise, surprise! Steve Troop and the Melonpool Puppets caught Don off guard at the San Diego Comic Convention. I've never seen Don at a loss for words, but these guys did it to him.

Dragon's Lair made its debut in the arcades in 1983 and it was a colossal success. Today, we are producing a two-minute online version. Dirk just keeps on swinging.

Next Issue
An American Tail



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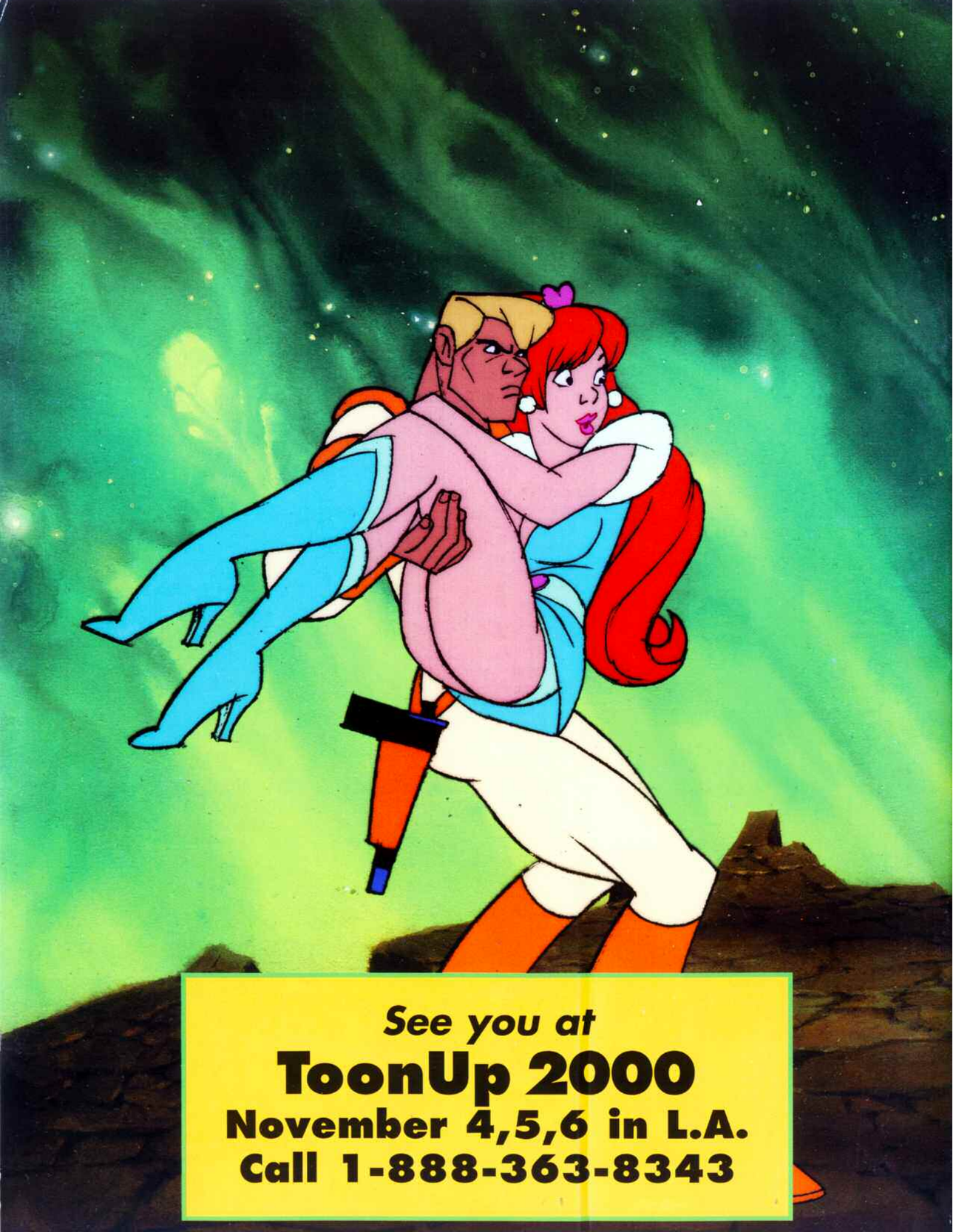
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